



Yoga Teacher Training

Teaching and Practicing Yin Yoga

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Introduction

Yin Yoga is a more meditative approach with a physical focus that is much deeper than typical hatha yoga practices. Here the practitioner is trying to access the deeper tissues such as the connective tissue and fascia and many of the postures focus on areas that encompass a joint (hips, sacrum, spine). As one ages, flexibility in the joints decreases and Yin yoga is a wonderful way to maintain that flexibility. People who practice yin yoga often refer to the more active forms of hatha yoga as “yang” practices.

Yin Yoga was initially called “Daoist” yoga, and was practiced to help regulate the flow of energy in the body, while targeting the deep connective tissues and the fascia that covers the body. Yin Yoga postures are more passive postures, mainly on the floor and fewer postures are included in a typical yin practice than in the more common yang like practices. Yin Yoga is unique in that you are asked to relax in the posture, soften the muscle and move closer to the bone. While yang-like yoga practices are more superficial, Yin offers a much deeper access to the body. It is not uncommon to see postures held for five minutes, even 20 minutes at a time. The time spent in these postures is much like time spent in meditation. Many of the Yin postures are similar to those in a yang style class, but they are usually called something else. This is done to help students realize the different intention of the postures in yin yoga, and to shift from active to passive.

This intimate practice of yoga requires students to be ready to get intimate with the self, with feelings, sensations, and emotions, something of which can be easy to avoid in a fast paced yoga practice. Yin yoga is often used in programs that deal with addictions, eating disorders, anxiety and deep pain or trauma. It can be helpful for people who struggle with being alone, sitting with feelings and sensations. This practice can help people develop greater mental, basically “learning to sit still.”

History of Yin Yoga

We know that the use of yin postures in yoga is not new. It has been around since the beginning of the physical practice of yoga. Thus no one person can be given credit for inventing yin postures. There was a time when all yoga was yin-like, and perhaps the balance was too far in that direction. A rebalancing occurred when yang postures grew in prominence. However, as time went on, yoga practice became more and more yang-like. Nature desires balance - we could say she demands balance. Yoga could not continue to be more and more yang without someone finding a way to bring it back into balance.

In the last decade of the 20th century, two teachers did start to bring yin postures back into the prominence they once had in the yoga world: Paul Grilley and Sarah Powers. Paul was first exposed to instances of long held postures in 1989, while attending Paulie Zink's Taoist Yoga classes, which he began in the 1970s. The history of the term, Taoist Yoga is also interesting. It is not a term that has been in use for very long. Its first occurrence was probably in a book called “Taoist Yoga:

Alchemy and Immortality," written by Lu K'uan Yu's (Charles Luk; 1898-1978) , which he published in 1973. The practice of Taoist Yoga equates simply to Chi Kung, but by using the word "yoga" in the name, Lu K'uan Yu was able to leverage the growing popularity of yoga to help students become interested in Chi Kung. After Lu K'uan Yu, a few other teachers, like Mantak Chia in the 1980's, also began to refer to their Chi Kung as Taoist Yoga as well. "Taoist Yoga" is part of what may be referred to as Popular Western Taoism, a form of New Age hybrid spirituality that appropriates some aspects of the religious tradition which is Daoism in order to increase cultural capital and marketability.

It was in the Taoist Yoga classes that Paul Grilley attended where Paulie Zink offered asana practice that included both yin postures and yang movements. While Paulie's Taoist Yoga was interesting, Paul resonated with was the long held postures. He got the idea that an entire yoga class could be yin in nature without any yang postures at all: an entire Yin Yoga practice was possible. He started offering this "all-yin" practice to his own Hatha Yoga students, and they too started to resonate with the practice. This was a new way to look at a very old paradigm. Unlike Restorative Yoga, which can also be viewed as yin-like, Paul's Yin Yoga was designed for healthy students, who could be pushed further physically. Paul Grilley's modern Yin Yoga was not easy: it was challenging. It took people outside their normal comfort zone, just as yoga had always done.

Sarah Powers became a student of yin yoga that she learned from Paul Grilley, and once Paul had worked out the physiological and energetic pathways to health and wholeness that Yin Yoga was utilizing, Sarah began to share her understanding with her own students. They in turn wanted to learn more. Sarah was the one who coined the term "Yin Yoga." Until then, Paul had been referring to his practice as Taoist Yoga, because that is what Paulie Zink had called his practice. But Sarah pointed out that what she and Paul were offering was not the Taoist practice taught by Paulie, but a revamped subset of his teaching. They were offering only the yin postures, so the practice should be called Yin Yoga.

Sarah's and Paul's students eventually became teaches in their own right. Yin Yoga began to establish an open source lineage through these teachers, and the practice continued to spread: a critical mass was building - one that would soon bring the yin-side of yoga into thousands of yoga studios throughout the world.

Benefits of Yin Yoga

Some of the benefits of Yin yoga are:

- Calming and balancing to the mind and body
- Regulates energy in the body
- Increases mobility in the body, especially the joints and hips
- Lowering of stress levels (no one needs that)
- Greater stamina
- Better lubrication and protection of joints
- More flexibility in joints & connective tissue
- Release of fascia throughout the body
- Help with TMJ and migraines
- Deeper Relaxation
- A great coping for anxiety and stress
- Better ability to sit for meditation
- Ultimately you will have a better Yang practice

If you incorporate a little of both yin and yang style yoga, you can create a more well-rounded practice. If you take a peek at a Yin-Yang symbol, it is suggesting that no matter what, we should take a “tiny bit” and put it in the heart of its opposite. Knowing both practices. Yin yoga can teach you to truly be still, to really come face to face with yourself, and to bring what yin teaches you into your more yang like practices and ultimately your life as a whole.

On a physical level, Yin enhances the natural range of motion in the joints. By keeping your muscles soft, you release deep layers of connective tissue, creating more ease in any style of yoga and in seated meditation. On an energetic level, Yin enhances the flow of prana (life force) in the tissues around the joints, where energy often stagnates. The practice is often likened to doing an acupuncture session on yourself: Sequences are often geared toward strengthening certain energy channels (called nadis in yoga or meridians in Chinese medicine), which ultimately support the organs, immune system, and emotional well-being.

And then there are the mental benefits: Holding poses for three to five minutes often brings up discomfort. Yin conditions you to stay with the intense sensations that arise, rather than quickly moving into the next pose. It trains you to become more comfortable with discomfort instead of becoming alarmed. It marries meditation and asana into a very deep practice.

Yin yoga teaches you how to really listen, you don't get the opportunity to go in and out, jump around and find a distracted version of stillness within your practice. Yin is such a great compliment to other styles and your own personal life, because it brings long periods of time in an uncomfortable position, which then asks you to learn to “be” to “accept what is” in that given moment. Something we can all benefit from.

Yin and Yang Compared

Many forms of hatha yoga today are dynamic and active practices designed to work the muscular tissues, or as yin yoga would say, the “yang” tissues of our bodies. Yin yoga allows students to work with the other “yin” parts or deeper parts of their bodies, including ligaments, joints, fascia, and bones. Because of the more fragile nature of these parts of the body, Yin yoga allows for a much slower practice, which is focused on yielding, allowing, and nourishing. The very slow pace can initially seem boring to students who are used to a more active form of hatha yoga, but the stillness allows for a deeper experience which can be challenging and, ultimately, very fulfilling. Most Yin yoga teachers encourage students to continue practicing yang forms of hatha yoga in addition to Yin yoga. This reflects the belief in the need to have a balance of yin and yang and an understanding that the two things complement each other, and provide specific benefits.

Yin yoga is based on the Taoist concepts of yin and yang, opposite and complementary principles in nature. Yin could be described as stable, immobile, feminine, passive, cold, and downward moving. Yang is understood to be changing, mobile, masculine, active, hot, and upward moving. The sun is considered yang, the moon yin. In the body, the relatively stiff connective tissues (tendons, ligaments, fascia) are yin, while the more mobile and pliable muscles and blood are yang. More passive asanas in yoga are considered yin, whereas the more active, dynamic asanas are yang, because they stimulate the muscles and generate heat. Sarah Powers and her colleagues say that yin yoga is most effective when more active, or yang forms of yoga or exercise are also practiced, either immediately before or after a yin session, or separately.

In Yin yoga, rather than using your body to get into the posture, you use the posture to get into your body.

Yin tissues include: ligament, bones, and joints

Yang tissues include: muscles, blood, skin

Yang styles of yoga typically target the muscles and use rhythmic repetitive movements to stress the fibers and cells of the muscles. Since the yang tissues are elastic and moist, they respond well to this type of stress. However, since Yin tissues can be thought of as dryer and less elastic, they are more prone to damage when stressed too much. They require gentler pressures that are applied for longer periods of time, in order to be stimulated and to grow stronger. Generally, one of the jobs of muscles is to protect the joint from too much stress. So, in yang forms of yoga, the body is placed in careful alignment and certain muscles are contracted to protect the joints. However, Yin yoga is specifically designed to exercise the ligaments and to regain space and strength in the joints.

Physically, hatha yoga can be thought to help both stability and mobility. The yang part of a practice helps with stability, while the yin part of a practice helps with mobility. According to Yin yoga, it is important not to apply yang practices to yin tissues. In yin yoga, we are not trying to stretch the ligament or joint, but are trying to offer a small stress to that ligament or joint to help it become stronger and more mobile.

Yin yoga poses apply moderate stress to the connective tissues—the tendons, fascia, and ligaments—with the aim of increasing circulation in the joints and improving flexibility. They are also designed to improve the flow of qi, the subtle energy said in Chinese medicine to run through the meridian pathways of the body. Improved qi flow is hypothesized to improve organ health, immunity, and emotional well-being. A more meditative approach to yoga, yin aims at cultivating awareness of one's inner silence, and bringing to light a universal, interconnecting quality.

Yin yoga employs specific sequences of poses aimed at stimulating particular meridians, or subtle channels, as understood in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). During the long hold times of the yin asanas, teachers usually give "dharma talks," informal monologues drawing from a variety of sources, according to teachers' choice. They will often explain the physiology and anatomy of poses, including the location of the meridian lines being affected. They may tell traditional yoga stories, recite yoga sutras, or reflect on their own experience.

Physiology

Muscles account for about forty percent of the resistance against the body's flexibility, while connective tissue accounts for about fifty percent. The intensity and physical benefits of yin yoga practice depend on two variables: duration of the asana, and the temperature of the muscle. Asanas are usually held for three to five minutes, but can be held for as long as twenty minutes. Because of the long duration of asanas, it is said that patience is another of the key values cultivated by yin yoga.

How to Practice Yin Yoga

It is usually recommended that yin yoga be practiced when the muscles are not yet warmed up. When the muscles are cold, they are less elastic, and more stress will be transferred to the connective tissue. However, this is a general rule and for some people, it is better to stay a bit warm while practicing. Because this style of yoga does not generate bodily heat, yin teachers recommend keeping the temperature of the room a little higher than usual. During yin asanas, muscles are relaxed to avoid muscle spasm, which could result from engaging muscles for long periods.

Distinction from hatha yoga

Although many yin yoga poses or asanas closely resemble the asanas in regular hatha yoga, they have different names, in part to alert those who are familiar with similar poses in hatha yoga not to perform them in the same way. In general, the poses of yin yoga are performed with very little muscular exertion. For example, in

the Cobra or Bhujangasana of hatha yoga, the practitioner lies prone and lifts the chest, curving the spine in an arc, reaching the legs back strongly. However in yin yoga, in the similar Seal pose, the upward movement of the trunk is entirely supported by the arms, and the legs are relaxed.

The three principles to a yin yoga practice:

- 1) Come into the pose to an appropriate depth
- 2) Resolve to remain still
- 3) Hold the pose for enough time

The first principle of Yin yoga is to go only to the point where you feel some resistance when coming into a posture. Don't try to go as deeply as possible right away. Give your body a chance to open up and invite you to go deeper. After 30 seconds or a minute, the body releases and greater depth may be possible. Listen to the body and respect its requests. Once you find the position that is best for yourself that day, you should resolve to remain still. This means that if you start to feel like you want to squirm, then simply notice that impulse and allow sensations or slight discomforts to be there, simply observing and remaining still. Finally, it is important to hold the pose for long enough time, so that you have the opportunity to fully come into stillness and fully experience the energy of the posture.

In Yin yoga, there is not a great need for a lot of postures, as compared with other forms of hatha yoga. If you are planning to hold each posture for five minutes and allow for 1 minute rest in between, along with five minutes of breathing and warm up activity at the beginning and a 5-10 minute savasana and meditation at the end, you will only have time for about 12 postures in a ninety minute class. And for postures that are done on two sides, they will count as two postures.

The benefits listed in the following asana descriptions are not exhaustive, but they will provide a guideline to help you to choose when to add a particular asana to your practice. If you wish to arrange your practice time around a particular area of the body or a particular organ that needs stimulation, the advice here may be useful. Combine this knowledge with the information provided on the affected joints, meridians and organs to structure your flow.

Contraindications should always be checked out before trying a posture for the first time. Remember, not all poses are for every body; know and respect your limits and those of your students. If a certain pose is not right for you, don't worry about it; there are lots of other ways to work the same tissues. Choose another posture that is more appropriate for you or your students. You will find some suggestions offered in the alternatives and options.

The recommended time to hold a pose is very subjective. The times listed represent the typical length of time in most yin yoga classes. However, some students can

remain in the asanas much longer than indicated; others must come out much earlier. Encourage your students to respect their body's unique needs.

When coming out of a pose there will be a natural sense of fragility - we have been deliberately pulling the body apart and holding it apart. The sense of relief is to be expected, and even enjoyed. One of the benefits of Yin Yoga is this experience of coming out of the asana. After a deep, long-held hip opener, it may feel like we will never be able to walk again - but be assured ... the fragility will pass. Sometimes, however, a movement in the opposite direction will help. It is helpful to use counterposes as balancing postures that bring us back to neutral.

Yin Yoga Postures

Many of these asanas will be familiar to experienced yoga students. However, these students will notice that the name is different in the yin tradition - this is deliberate. The pose may look the same, but the intention is different. The yin pose of Swan looks identical to the yang pose of Pigeon, but in Pigeon, as in most yang poses, the muscles are the targets. In a yang pose, we engage the muscles and stretch them. In the yin practice, we relax the muscles; we aim our intention into the joints and the deep tissues wrapping them, not the more superficial tissues of the muscles or skin.

There is no consensus in the world of yoga on naming asanas. Even in the yang tradition you will come across different names for the same postures and different postures sharing the same names. This is also true in the yin tradition; different names abound. The ones shown here are the names more commonly used but they are not universal. Where two names are common, both names are given, but we have not attempted to be exhaustive.

In Yin yoga, contraindication and counter postures become even more important due to the length of time in each posture and the focus on affecting the deeper tissues through relaxed static positioning.

In each of the following postures, the Yin name for the posture is given, followed by the yang or Sanskrit name, if applicable.

Dangling (Easy forward fold)



Benefits:

- Gentle stretch for the lower spine
- Loosens the hamstrings and warms up the quadriceps
- Compresses the stomach and internal organs
- Builds strength in the diaphragm while providing a massage for the abdominal organs
- Cures menstrual cramps

Contra-indications:

- Avoid if you have high blood pressure. Related conditions that are a problem when blood pressure is increased include diabetes and glaucoma. If you have these conditions you may wish to avoid this pose.
- If you have low blood pressure, to come out of the pose, roll up to standing slowly or go into squat to avoid dizziness.
- If you have a bad back, bend your knees a lot! You can also rest your elbows on the thighs.
- If you have any lower back disorders which do not allow flexion of the spine, then do not allow the spine to round: keep the back as straight as you can and bend the knees a lot.

Getting Into the Pose:

- Stand up, with the feet hip-width apart. Bend your knees and fold forward. Clasp the elbows with the opposite hands.

Alternatives & Options:

- Bend knees more, which will strengthen the quadriceps and release the back.
- Rest elbows against a table, chair, or on the thighs if the back feels strained.
- Caterpillar is an easy alternative; sit down with legs straight.
- If you do this pose more than once, try it with legs bent the first time and straight the second time.

- If you're really flexible, try holding the wrists behind the legs but still with some rounding to the back.

Coming Out of the Pose:

- Bend your knees a bit more and release your hands to the floor. Slowly roll up. This is often called Rag Doll.
- You can place your hands onto your shins and come up halfway, then fold back down. Do this a couple of times, and when you feel ready, come all the way up with a straight back.

Counter poses:

- Squat or any gentle backbend

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- Due to the intense stretch along the back of the legs and spine, the Urinary Bladder meridian is highly stimulated
- Great for the liver, spleen, and kidneys.

Joints Affected:

- The Spine.

Recommended Hold Times:

- Three minutes can be intense. Sometimes this pose is done in two or more sessions of two minutes each, separated by two minutes of Squat.

Similar Yang Asanas:

- The yang version is known as Uttanasana, but in the Yin Yoga version the emphasis is not to stretch the hamstrings a lot, but rather to release the lower back. If the legs are straight, it is a nice stretch for the hamstrings, but there is some muscular effort needed. If the knees are bent, it is a great strengthener for the thigh muscles and allows the back to release more fully.

Other Notes:

- Ensure the arches of the feet are lifting
- Balance the weight between toes and heels. You can gently sway or wobble, but no bouncing.
- Straight legs will stretch the hamstrings; bent knees will strengthen the thigh muscles.
- It is more yin-like to bend the knees, bringing the chest to the thighs (you'll receive a stomach massage, too).
- Can intermix this and Squat. Eventually, hold both for four minutes or more in total

Squat (Malasana)



Benefits:

- Opens the hips and strengthens the ankles
- Releases the lower back
- Can be a great pose to prepare the body for childbirth
- Offers relief to women suffering severe lower back pain due to their menstrual cycle

Contra-indications:

- If hips are too tight, this can torque the knees.
- If you have knee trauma, avoid this pose.

Getting Into the Pose:

- Start by standing with the feet hip-width apart. Squat down and bring your arms in front of you, hands in prayer and elbows pulling lightly against the knees or shins.

Alternatives & Options:

- If your heels are off the floor, use a folded blanket or bolster under them. We want the body to relax. Another option if the heels are off the floor is to widen the distance between the feet.
- Watch where the knees are pointing compared to where the feet are pointing. They should point in the same direction. If they are not, spread the feet wider or rest the heels on a folded blanket or on a bolster.
- When the feet are wide apart (hip width or more), this pose works into the hips more deeply.
- When the feet are close together (perhaps even touching), this pose works the ankles more deeply.

- A deep variation is to keep the feet together but with the knees wide apart. Lean forward, wrapping your arms around the shins and then behind the back, clasping the hands together.
- Another option is to place your hands behind your head and gently draw the chin to the chest: this adds a stretch to the back of the neck.

Coming Out of the Pose:

- An easy exit is to just sit down and then slowly straighten the legs out in front of you.
- A more challenging exit is to come to Dangling by straightening the legs and folding forward. As you straighten the legs, align the feet so that they are pointing in the same direction as your knees.

Counter poses:

- Dangling, as just described, helps to release the knees and back
- Ankle stretch or Vajrasana

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- The Liver and Kidney lines as they run through the groin and the Urinary Bladder lines on the back.
- If you feel this through your ankles you may also be stimulating the Stomach, Spleen, Gall Bladder, and Urinary Bladder meridians.

Joints Affected:

- Hips, knees and ankles.

Recommended Hold Times

- Two to three minutes at one time; however, you can revisit this pose a couple of times during the practice

Other Notes:

- Approximately two-thirds of the world's population goes to the bathroom every day this way! If uncomfortable, it may be a sign that you need to do this more.
- A nice sequence is to go from Dangling to Squat, back to Dangling, back to Squat, over and over again, holding each position for one to two minutes.
- Elbows in front of knees can be used as levers to pull the chest forward, allowing the tailbone to drop lower

Toe Squat



Benefits:

- Open toes and feet and strengthens ankles
- Stimulates all six lines of the lower body meridians (which begin or end in the toes)

Contra-indications:

- Sitting on the heels may strain the knees.
- If ankles or toe joints are very tight, don't stay here long.

Getting Into the Pose:

- Begin by sitting on your heels with the feet together. Tuck the toes under and try to be on the balls of the feet, not the tippy-toes. Reach down and tuck the little toes under.

Alternatives & Options:

- If the pose becomes too challenging, stand up on the knees, relieving most of the pressure on the toe joints. When you feel you can handle it again, sit back down on the heels.
- Don't stay if in pain!
- You can combine this posture with shoulder exercises like Eagle arms or Cow Face arms.
- If the knees are uncomfortable, place a blanket under them or a cushion between the hips and heels. You may enjoy a rolled-up towel behind the knees, which helps to release the knee joint.

Coming Out of the Pose:

- This one can be quite juicy, so come out slowly, enjoying every single minute! Lean forward onto your hands, lift your hips forward, and release your feet. Point the feet backwards and sit on your heels again. Sigh!

Counter poses:

- Ankle Stretch or Child's Pose, or any pose that opens the ankles, such as Saddle.

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- All the meridians of the lower body get stimulated through the compression in the toes.
- The front of the ankle also becomes compressed helping to open the Spleen, Liver, Stomach, and Gall Bladder lines.

Joints Affected:

- Toes and ankles.

Recommended Hold Times:

- Two to three minutes.

Other Notes:

- This pose can become quite intense for most people fairly quickly. Monitor the level of intensity. It is better not to stay in the pose if you are in pain.
- If doing shoulder work while holding the pose, take a break between sides. Do an Ankle Stretch, and then come back into Toe Stretch and resume the shoulder work on the other side

Camel (Ustrasana)



Benefits:

- Deeply arches the sacral/lumbar spine and opens the top of the thighs; provides some opening in the ankles
- Stretches the hip flexors and opens the shoulders; excellent for drooping shoulders or hunched backs [1]

Contra-indications:

- Elderly and those with spinal injuries can do this pose. [2] However, seek medical advice if you fit either category.
- Without support, the back can spasm, so those with weak backs may want to do only the gentle versions (see below);
- If you have any neck issues, do not drop head back; keep the chin to the chest.

Getting Into the Pose:

- The easiest way to come into Camel is to sit on your heels, place your hands behind you on the floor, and lift your hips forward. As the hips move forward, your back will arch.

Alternatives & Options:

- You may also come into this pose by standing on your knees and holding your hands on your hips. Keeping the hips forward, arch your back. (This may be unsuitable for people with back problems, because there is little support from the hands in this version. Instead, do the hands-on-the-floor version.)
- Walking the hands on the floor toward the feet may be unsuitable for people with knee problems because there is more pressure in the knees in the early stages of this variation
- If you're very flexible you may wish to bring your hands to the floor between the feet or move the hands toward the knees. If you're less flexible, the toes can be tucked under and the hands rested on the heels or on a block between the feet.

- If the neck is okay, you may lengthen the neck and allow the head to drop back.

Coming Out of the Pose:

- There are two ways to come out of this pose: The easy way is to walk your hands backward until you are sitting on your heels again. If your head was dropped back, keep it back while you bring your chest forward and fold into Child's Pose. The second way is to come back up to standing on your knees. If your head was back, lift the chest forward, allowing the head to remain dropped back until the shoulders are over the hips. Then bring the head forward and sit back into Child's Pose.

Counter poses:

- Child's Pose ... Coming out slowly, lift chest forward, allowing the head to remain dropped back until the shoulders are over the hips, then bring the head forward and sit back into Child's Pose.

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- The deep compression in the sacrum and lumbar spine stimulates the Urinary Bladder and Kidney meridians, while any feeling of stretch in the top of the thighs and stomach stimulates the Spleen and Stomach meridians.
- Sometimes the upper arms and shoulders are stressed, which stimulates the Heart and Lung meridians.
- If the neck is dropped back, the thyroid will be stimulated.

Joints Affected:

- The spine, shoulders and ankles

Recommended Hold Times:

- One to two minutes at most.

Child's Pose (Balasana)



Benefits:

- A healing, restful pose - useful any time a break is needed
- Gently stretches the spine and is always a nice counterpose for backbends
- Gentle compression of the stomach and chest benefits the organs of digestion
- Psychologically soothing when feeling cold, anxious, or vulnerable
- Can relieve back and neck pain when the head is supported
- If the knees are fairly close together, rocking gently side to side can help stimulate the flow of blood and lymph fluids in the upper chest and breast tissues.

Contra-indications:

- If you have diarrhea or are pregnant
- Can be uncomfortable just after eating
- If knee issues exist, you may need to place a towel or blanket between thighs and calves or avoid the pose altogether.
- You may need a blanket or other padding under the ankles to reduce discomfort on the top of the feet.

Getting Into the Pose:

- Begin by sitting on your heels and then slowly fold forward, bringing your chest to your thighs and your forehead to the earth.

Alternatives & Options:

- Can be done with arms stretched forward, which may avoid placing too much pressure on the neck (this reduces the shoulder relaxation).
- If you cannot get your buttocks to your heels, the head will have a lot of weight on it. Support the neck by placing the forehead on hands or on a bolster.
- Allow the knees to be as close together as is comfortable, but they do not have to touch. If there is any uncomfortable pinching in the lower belly and tops of the front hips, separate the knees wider.
- You can do this as a preparation for the Frog by spreading the knees farther apart halfway through the pose, while continuing to sit on the heels.
- Many students love to place a bolster under their chest.

Coming Out of the Pose:

- Use your hands to push the floor away and slowly roll up.

Counter poses:

- A counterpose is not normally needed after this pose.

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- The Spleen and Stomach meridians are compressed while the Kidneys and Urinary Bladder meridians are stretched.

Joints Affected:

- The spine and ankle.

Recommended Hold Times:

- As long as you want
- If used as a counterpose, hold for up to one minute.
- If used as a yin pose on its own, hold for three to five minutes. If you cannot get your head to the floor, five minutes may be too long.

Other Notes:

- This pose can be used as a preparation for Straddle pose or deeper forward bends like Snail

Ankle Stretch



Benefits:

- Opens and strengthens the ankles
- Strong stimulation of four meridians flowing through the feet and ankles
- Great counter pose for squatting or toe exercises

Contra-indications:

- If there is any sharp pain in the ankles, back off. Try placing a blanket or towel under the feet to cushion them.
- Knee issues may prevent you from sitting on the heels. Placing a rolled-up towel behind the knees may be very therapeutic, but a cushion between the thighs and calves may be required.

Getting Into the Pose:

- Begin by sitting on the heels. If your ankles or knees complain, this may not be the pose for you.

Alternatives & Options:

- Leaning back on the hands is the first position (and the least stressful), but beware of collapsing backward. Keep the heart forward, and imagine you are trying to do a backbend.
- After a few moments, bring the hands to the floor beside your legs.
- Try not to lean away from the knees. Keep the heart open, arching the back forward.
- Finally, try holding the knees and gently pulling them toward the chest.

Coming Out of the Pose:

- Lean forward and bring your hands to the floor beside the knees. Slowly step one foot at a time back to a push-up position.

Counter poses:

- Pushup/Plank/Chaturanga, Crocodile or any posture that straightens the legs and tucks the toes under.
- Dangling or Squatting is also nice.

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- Stomach, Spleen, Liver, Gall Bladder lines are strongly stimulated.

Joints Affected:

- The ankle.

Recommended Hold Times:

- About one minute. Relatively intense, this shouldn't be held for a long time if there is a lot of discomfort. In time you may be able to sit like this for a very long time.

Other Notes:

- This is a nice counterpose for many postures that stress the feet, such as Toe Squat, and regular Squat.

Dragon (Low Lunge – Anjaneyasana)



Benefits:

- Deep hip and groin opener that gets right into the joint
- Stretches the back leg's hip flexors and quadriceps
- Many variations to help work deeply into hip socket
- Can help with sciatica

Contra-indications:

- Can be uncomfortable for the kneecap or ankle. If you are stiff, the back thigh will be at a 90 degree angle to the front thigh, putting a lot of weight on the kneecap. Support the back knee with a blanket, or place a bolster under the shin, allowing the back knee to be off the floor.

Getting Into the Pose:

- Begin either on hands and knees or in Down Dog. Step one foot between the hands. Walk the front foot forward until the knee is right above the heel. Slide the back knee backward as far as you can. Keep the hands on either side of the front foot.

Alternatives & Options:

- If the back knee is uncomfortable, place a blanket under it, rest the shin on a bolster, or tuck the toes under and lift the leg off the floor.
- If the ankle is uncomfortable, place a blanket underneath or raise the knee by putting a bolster under the shin.
- Press top of foot down firmly, emphasizing the little toe.

Alternative Dragons:

1. The first alternative pose is a simple low lunge called Baby Dragon, as shown in the picture at the top of the page. If you like, you can rest your hands on blocks.
2. The next option is to rest the arms or hands on the front thigh and lift the chest, increasing the weight over the hips. This is called Dragon Flying High.

3. A deeper option, Dragon Flying Low, is to place both hands inside the front foot and walk hands forward, lowering the hips. For more depth, come down on the elbows or rest them on a bolster or block.
4. In Twisted Dragon, one hand pushes the front knee to the side, while the chest rotates to the sky.
5. In Winged Dragon, with hands on the floor, wing out the knee a few times, rolling onto the outside edge of that foot and then stay there with the knee low. You could come down on the elbows or rest them on a block or bolster.
6. Overstepping Dragon exercises the ankle. From Baby Dragon, allow the front knee to come far forward and/or slide the heel backward, until the heel is just about to lift off the ground.
7. Dragon Splits offers the deepest stretch for hip flexors. Straighten both legs into the splits. Support the front hip with a bolster under the buttock for balance and to release weight; this relaxes the muscles. Sit up tall or fold forward for different sensations.
8. For Fire-Breathing Dragon, in any of the above variations, tuck the back toe under and lift the knee up, lengthening the leg. This puts more weight into the hips, increasing the stretch.



Dragon Flying Low



Twisted Dragon

Coming Out of the Pose:

- Move your paws to Down Dog position, move the back knee forward a bit, tuck the back toes under, and with a nice groan, step back to Down Dog.

Counter poses:

- A short Down Dog is delicious. Bend one knee, lifting that heel and pushing the opposite heel down, and then switch sides repeatedly.
- Child's Pose feels really good after Down Dog and before switching to the other side of the Dragon.

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- Stomach, Spleen, Liver, Gall Bladder, and Kidneys (and even the Urinary Bladder in the Dragon Flying High or the Dragon Splits High).

Joints Affected:

- Hips and ankles;
- Lower back in the backbend options.

Recommended Hold Times:

- Hold each variation for one minute and cycle through all of them.
- Hold just one variation for three to five minutes.

Other Notes:

- You may not feel anything in the outer hip joint. If your hip flexors or quadriceps are tight, that area will take all the stress. This is still a good pose, but to work your hips, other poses will be needed

Melting Heart (Anahatasana)



Benefits:

- A nice backbend for the upper and middle back
- Will also open shoulders
- Softens the heart.

Contra-indications:

- If you have a bad neck, this could strain it.
- Be aware of any tingling in the hands or fingers! This is often a sign that a nerve is being compressed, and if we continue to compress it we may permanently damage it. If you feel tingling, adjust the arm and hand positions, or skip the pose entirely.

Getting Into the Pose:

- On your hands and knees, walk your hands forward, allowing your chest to drop toward the floor. Keep your hips right above your knees. If possible, keep your hands shoulder width apart

Alternatives & Options:

- If shoulder pain prevents the arms from going overhead, move them further apart.
- If you're flexible, you can bring the chin to the floor and look ahead, but this could strain the neck.
- If knees are uncomfortable here, place a blanket underneath them.
- Toes can be tucked under
- Chest can be rested on a bolster (allowing the body to relax).
- You can do this pose with just one arm forward at a time, resting the head upon the other forearm.

Coming Out of the Pose:

- Either move back into Child's Pose or slide forward onto your belly.

Counter poses:

- Lying on your stomach or in Child's Pose can be nice here. Since this posture is a backbend, Child's Pose is a better choice for a counterpose because it is a mild forward fold.

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- Compression along the spine stimulates the Urinary Bladder lines.
- If you feel the stretch in the chest, then your Stomach and Spleen lines are stimulated.
- This posture can juice up the arm meridians, especially the Heart and Lung lines.

Joints Affected:

- Nice compression for the upper back
- Mildly stresses the lower spine
- Shoulder/Humerus joint.

Recommended Hold Times:

- Three to five minutes
- If resting your chin on floor, the hold may need to be shorter. Carefully watch the sensations in the neck.

Similar Yang Asanas:

- Half Down Dog (aka Puppy Dog).

Other Notes:

- It is nice to do this pose after a series of lower back bends.
- Can be used as a gentle warm up to deeper back bends.
- If you feel pinching in the back of the shoulders, you may be reaching a compression point. Abducting the arms (moving them farther apart) may release this.

Frog



Benefits:

- Deep groin opener (especially the adductors)
- Provides a slight back bend, which compresses the lower back
- Aids digestion and relieves cramps

Contra-indications:

- If you have a bad back
- Knees can be uncomfortable, so use padding under the knees
- If the neck is stiff, rest the forehead, not the chin, on the floor or on a bolster
- If prone to tingling in the hands when you extend the arms overhead, you may need to move the hands wider apart or closer together. If that doesn't help, do one arm at a time.

Getting Into the Pose:

- Start in Child's Pose and slide both hands forward, separate the knees, but remain sitting on the heels. This is also known as the Tadpole

Alternatives & Options:

Half Frog: Lift the hips higher, until hips are in line with knees, keeping feet together.

Full Frog: separate feet as wide as the knees.

- Extend one arm at a time, which is safer than extending both arms forward. The other arm can be bent with the head resting on the forearm.
- Allow the hips to come further forward if the pressure in groin or hips is too severe.
- Alternately, keep toes together and allow hips to go backwards.
- May rest the chest on bolster, to relax upper body.
- If the shoulders are uncomfortable, spread the hands wider apart.



Half Frog

Coming Out of the Pose:

- Either sit back into Child's Pose or slide forward onto your belly, bringing your legs together.

Counter poses:

- Child's Pose;
- Lying on the back, hug knees to chest, and rock side to side, or move knees in circles.

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- Inner leg pressure works the Spleen, Liver and Kidney meridians
- When the arms are stretched forward, the upper body meridians are massaged, affecting the lines of Heart, Lungs, and Small and Large Intestines

Joints Affected:

- Hips, lower back and shoulders.

Recommended Hold Times:

- Three to five minutes

Other Notes:

- When the hips are in line with knees, gravity has maximum effect. Often students will move hips forward to avoid painful compression in the hips - that is okay.
- If doing this right after eating, rest on the elbows and don't let the stomach rest on the floor. Allow it to hang, which is nice for digestion.
- A nice pose to do to begin a class, or if short of time.
- To advance in this posture, don't go deeper, just stay longer!
- You could do the first half of the pose in Tadpole and then move to Full Frog for the second half

Sphinx and Seal



Sphinx



Seal

Benefits:

- Can be a very deep compression and stimulation of the sacral-lumbar arch
- Tones the spine. People with bulging or herniated disks may find this very therapeutic.
- If the neck is dropped back, the thyroid will also be stimulated.
- In the full Seal pose, the stomach may receive a lovely stretch, as well.

Contra-indications:

- If you have a bad back or tight sacrum
- If there are any sharp pains here, you must come out!
- Pregnancy (after 1st trimester)
- Avoid if you have a headache.

Getting Into the Pose:

- Lie down on your belly. Clasp your elbows with the opposite hands and move the elbows just ahead of your shoulders, propping yourself up. Notice how this feels in your lower back. If the sensations are too strong, move your elbows further ahead, lowering your chest closer to the floor. If you like, you can place your palms flat on the floor in front of you like a sphinx

Alternatives & Options:

- For a gentle Sphinx, rest on the ribs, sliding the elbows away to reduce compression in the lower back. Simply lying on your stomach may be enough of a backbend for you.
- You can use a cushion under the elbows, helping to elevate the chest and deepen the posture.
- Alternatively, you can place a bolster under the arm pits and relax completely.
- Seal pose with straight, locked arms is the deepest pose; let the hands rotate outward a little. Slide your hands away to lessen the intensity.
- You may feel the highest amount of compression in the lower back if your hands are not right under the shoulders but slightly forward. This provides some pressure in the lower back.

- Rather than have the arms in front, Paulie Zink likes to have the hands and arms straight out to the side, which makes this look more like a seal.
- Bend the knees for more compression in the sacrum.
- You may spread the legs apart to deepen the sensations in the lower back.
- You may prefer to keep the legs together to release the sacrum or make the sensations more even along the spine.
- You can place a bolster or blanket under the pubic bone or thighs to soften the pressure. This is really nice for pregnant women.
- Tightening the buttocks is okay within reason. Sagging the shoulders is also okay.
- To arch the neck and stimulate the cervical spine, lengthen the neck, drop the head back, lift the chin, and open the throat.
- If your head gets too heavy for your neck, try resting your head in your hands or your chin on your fists.
- If you're flexible, try these postures with the legs in lotus.

Coming Out of the Pose:

- To come out, slowly lower your chest to the floor. Turn your head to one side and rest your cheek on your palms. You may wish to decompress the lower back more by sliding one knee up. Choose the knee that you are looking toward, and keep the knee and foot on the floor.

Counter poses:

- Child's Pose is a nice, gentle forward fold; move into it slowly. You may need to rest your head on your palms.
- On your way to Child's Pose you may crave Cat's Breath: flow from the Upward Facing Cat to the Downward Facing Cat (aka Cat/Cow) but flow gently, in time with the breath. Don't make these your deepest Cats ever.

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- Affects the Urinary Bladder and Kidney lines as they run through the lower back and sacrum
- Affects the Stomach and Spleen meridians along top of legs
- Stimulates the kidneys and adrenal glands through compression [3]

Joints Affected:

- Lower spine and the neck (if dropped back)

Recommended Hold Times:

- Sphinx can be held longer than Seal
- For Seal, start with one minute holds, then lower down, rest, and repeat several times
- Up to five minutes
- Eventually up for twenty minutes!

Similar Yang Asanas:

- Cobra

Other Notes:

- Imagine the spine like a row of Christmas tree lights draping to the floor;
- If the arms are straight, this pose is a deeper backbend than Saddle and, thus, could be done after Saddle. If the arms are bent (as in Sphinx), this is not as deep as Saddle, so it may be done beforehand.
- Ideal for adding some breath work and conscious energy movement

Saddle (Reclined Hero – Supta Virasana)



Benefits:

- A deep opening in the sacral-lumbar arch
- Also stretches hips flexors and quadriceps
- Excellent for athletes and people who do a lot of standing or walking [1]
- Stimulates the thyroid if the neck is dropped back
- If the foot is, or the feet are, beside the hips, this becomes a good internal rotation of the hip.

Contra-indications:

- If you have a bad back or tight sacroiliac (SI) joints
- Knees can be tested too much here
- Ankles can protest
- Any sharp or burning pain here, you must come out!

Getting Into the Pose:

- There are several options for coming into this pose. Start with simply sitting on the heels and notice how this feels. If there's pain in the knees, skip this one. If your ankles are complaining, try a blanket under them or skip the pose. Lean back on your hands, creating a little arch to the lower back. Check in with how this feels. If you can go further, come down onto your elbows

Alternatives & Options:

- If this is too deep for the lower back, do the Sphinx pose.
- You can also straighten one leg for Half Saddle. You can bend the straight leg and place the foot on the floor (note pictures). A deep variation is to hug the top knee toward the chest. That can get quite juicy.
- If you can only go as far back as your elbows, rest on a bolster to relax here. There are various ways you may use bolsters-stack two crossways under the shoulders, or use just one, or place one lengthwise under the spine.
- Resting the top of the head on the floor opens the throat.
- Arms overhead can open the shoulders and intensify the stretch in the hip flexors.
- Lift the hips even higher by placing a block between the feet and under the buttocks.
- A blanket or rolled up towel under the ankles can relieve pressure there.

- You can add a twist in the Saddle by bringing a hand behind the back and grabbing the inner thigh, which stimulates the shoulder lines. In this version, you won't lean back onto the head or the elbows; from sitting, just arch back and remember to do both sides!
- Play with sitting on the heels and between the heels; the first emphasizes the lumbar more, and the second works the quads and hip flexors more.

Coming Out of the Pose:

- There are several ways to end this pose. If you can, come back up the way you went down, propping yourself up on your elbows and then onto the hands. Lie down on your belly, straightening your legs slowly to allow the knees to release.
- Or try rolling to one side and slowly straighten the opposite leg.
- If you're flexible, you can just lift your knees up and pop your feet out.

Counter poses:

- After coming out, lie quietly on your back for a few breaths with the legs straight, tightening and releasing the kneecaps. When you are ready, hug the backs of the thighs and pull the knees to the chest to release the lower back.
- Child's Pose: move into it slowly. You may need to rest your head on your palms before coming into a full Child's Pose.
- Crocodile or Push-up engage the knees and tone the core of the body.
- If you came out and are lying on your back, try Hinge: while lying on your back, raise and lower the legs; knees bent is easiest, straight legs is harder.

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- Stomach, Spleen, Urinary Bladder, and Kidney lines
- If your arms are overhead, you will also work the Heart and Lung meridians.

Joints Affected:

- The SI joints, lower spine, knees, and ankles

Recommended Hold Times:

- One to five minutes;
- Some Yin yoga instructors recommend up to 15 minutes

Other Notes:

- This is not a deep backbend for experienced yogis who are already very open in the lower back; however, this pose does work many areas at once: ankles, knees, quadriceps, hip flexors, sacrum and lumbar, and shoulders.
- If your job requires you to stand all day and you do this pose at night before bed, your legs will feel rested in the morning.
- Unlike the yang poses, don't tuck the tailbone as we normally would in backbends

Thread the Needle



Benefits:

- Stretches shoulders and upper back
- Gently stretches the spine
- Provides a gentle inversion

Contra-indications:

- Can be uncomfortable just after eating
- If knee issues exist, you may need to place a towel or blanket between thighs and calves or avoid the pose altogether.
- You may need a blanket or other padding under the ankles to reduce discomfort on the top of the feet

Getting into the Pose

- Start on all fours. As you inhale, lift your right hand off the floor. When you exhale, sweep your right hand between your left hand and your knees. Place your right arm on the floor with your palm up. Rest your right cheek on the floor. Gently press down with the left hand to go more deeply into the posture. Fully relax and allow the floor to support the weight of your upper body.

Alternatives & Options

- A blanket or rolled towel can be placed under the knees to eliminate pressure
- Wrap your top arm around your back to enhance the twist



Arm behind back version

Coming Out of the Pose

- If your top arm is wrapped behind your back, bring it back to the floor. Slowly push into the floor with your hand and come back onto all fours.

Counter Poses

- After coming out of the pose, bring your legs out in front of you in a seated position (dandasana) and then bring your hands on the floor behind you and squeeze the shoulder blades together. You can also bend your knees and press your hips up into a belly up table top position.

Joints Affected

- Thoracic and cervical spine, knees, shoulders

Recommended Hold Times

- Two to five minutes

Swan/Sleeping Swan (Pigeon)



Benefits:

- A vigorous way to open the hips, allowing gravity to do the work
- Strong external rotation of front hip (especially in the image shown)
- Provides the quadriceps and hip flexors a nice stretch for the side that has the leg back
- A moderate to strong backbend, compressing the lower back

Contra-indications:

- If you have bad knees (especially any problems with the inner meniscus), watch the pressure
- If hips are too tight, that is where the pressure will go. If this happens, bring the front foot back, more toward or under that hip.

Getting Into the Pose:

- You can come into this pose either from Down Dog (which is more advanced) or from Cat pose (on hands and knees). Slide your right knee between your hands, lean a bit to the right, and check in with how your right knee is going to feel. If the knee is fine, flex the right foot and move it forward; if the knee feels stressed, bring the foot closer in toward the right hip. Now, center yourself so your weight is even. Try tucking the back toes under and sliding the back knee away. Do this a few times until your right buttock is on the floor or as low as it is going to get.

Alternatives & Options (Swan):

- To protect the front knee, keep the foot flexed before coming forward.
- Keep the weight back into the hips as you lower yourself.
- Stay on the hands with the arms straight, or come on to the elbows.
- You could lie on a bolster placed lengthwise under the chest.
- If you're really flexible, try to bring the front foot forward, pull the bent knee more to the side, and lay your chest on top of the shin.
- Other alternatives include reclined hip opener (can be done lying down, while sitting, or with one leg against the wall), Shoelace, or Square Pose.

Alternatives & Options (Sleeping Swan):

- To protect the front knee, keep the foot flexed before coming forward.
- Keep the weight back into the hips as you lower yourself.
- Stay on the hands with the arms straight, or come on to the elbows.
- You could lie on a bolster placed lengthwise under the chest.
- If you're really flexible, try to bring the front foot forward, pull the bent knee more to the side, and lay your chest on top of the shin.
- Other alternatives include Reclined Hip Opener (can be done lying down, while sitting, or with one leg against the wall), Shoelace, or Square Pose.

Coming Out of the Pose:

- Use your hands to push the floor away and slowly come up. Tuck the back toes under, plant your front paws in Down Dog position, and with a nice groan, step back to the Downward Facing Puppy.

Counter poses:

- Windshield Wipers are a nice way to internally rotate your hips
- Child's Pose (nice if you did full Swan)
- A Quick Down Dog before Child's Pose

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- Liver and Kidney lines because these lines come through the inner groin; the Stomach and Spleen meridians (from the line on the top of the back leg); the Gall Bladder line on outer leg and the Urinary Bladder line through lumbar arch.

Joints Affected:

- Hips and lower back. Make sure the knees are not complaining

Recommended Hold Times:

- This is a moderately yang posture when the chest is raised: hold one to two minutes. After a couple of minutes, switch to Sleeping Swan for another one to three minutes.

Other Notes:

- Full Swan is a deeper hip opener than Sleeping Swan because more weight is placed right above the front hip.
- Full Swan can be a gentle backbend, but it can be deepened if you're really flexible by raising the arms overhead or clasping the hands behind the lower back and pulling them toward the floor.
- If you have lost the feeling, wiggle around until you find it again. Sometimes a subtle adjustment of the legs can increase the sensation in the front hip but reduce the stretch in the quadriceps of the back leg. You can decide where your priority is today

Shoelace (Knee to Knee)



Benefits:

- A great hip opener, and decompression for the lower spine when folding forward

Contra-indications:

- Hard on the pelvis and knees and can aggravate sciatica. If you have sciatica, elevate the hips by sitting on a cushion so the knees are below them. Beware of hips rotating backward while seated; we want them to rotate forward.
- If you have any lower back disorders which do not allow flexion of the spine, then do not allow the spine to round: keep the back as straight as you can.

Getting Into the Pose:

- There are several options for coming into this pose. One way is to begin by kneeling on all fours then place one knee behind the other and sit back between the heels. A second approach is to begin by sitting on your heels and then slide onto one buttock and bring the outside foot over toward the opposite hip. A third approach is to begin by sitting cross-legged and then draw one foot under the opposite thigh and the other foot over toward the opposite hip.
- Try not to sit on the feet but slide them as far forward as they can go. Anchor both sitting bones to the ground.

Alternatives & Options:

- If hips are tight, sit on a bolster to tilt them forward.
- If the bottom knee complains, do the pose with the bottom leg straight. If the top knee complains, place a bolster or blanket under that knee. If this is still too hard, sit cross-legged and fold forward.
- Support the chest with bolster.
- When folding forward, you can support the head with the hands, leaning the elbows onto the thighs or a block or bolster.
- Hands can be to the side or in front of the body, or stretch the arms back behind the body.

- If sensations are too intense in the hips or knees, remain upright or take more weight into the hands and arms.
- Side bends or twists can be added here, which work the Gall Bladder meridian along sides of the torso;
- Other alternatives include Reclined Hip Opener, Square Pose, or Swan.



Shoelace with Sidebend

Coming Out of the Pose:

- Lean back to release the hips and slowly straighten the legs.

Counter poses:

- Windshield Wipers (to provide an internal rotation of the leg)
- Deer pose
- Tabletop

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- Liver, Kidney, and Gall Bladder. If folding forward, the Urinary Bladder line will be stimulated and the stomach compressed.

Joints Affected:

- Hips and lower spine.

Recommended Hold Times:

- Three to five minutes per side;

Other Notes:

- It is nice to follow this with Sleeping Swan, before doing other side.
- Start with the most-open hip first (whichever hip is more open, place that knee on top).
- Keep weight back into sitting bones when you come forward, preventing the weight from moving into the knees.
- Keep hips even. There is a tendency for the top hip to be pulled forward.
- While you are lingering in this pose, try some poses targeting the shoulders or wrists. Check the section on the upper body for some suggestions.

Dragonfly (Seated Straddle)



Benefits:

- Opens the hips, groin, and the back of thighs
- Provides a gentle opening to inner knees
- Stimulates the ovaries

Contra-indications:

- Can aggravate sciatica. If you have this condition, elevate the hips. Beware of hips rotating backward while seated; we want them to rotate forward.
- If you have any lower back disorders which do not allow flexion of the spine, then do not allow the spine to round: keep the back as straight as you can.
- If you have any inner knee trauma or issues, bring the legs closer together or tighten the top of the legs (the quadriceps) to engage the kneecaps.

Getting Into the Pose:

- From a sitting position, spread your legs apart until they won't go any further. Sitting on a cushion will help tilt your hips. Fold forward, resting your weight into your hands with your arms locked straight, or rest your elbows onto a block.

Alternatives & Options:

- Use bolster to raise hips. Or use bolster to support head and chest
- Can keep hands behind the back, or rest elbows on a bolster.
- Folding over one leg increases spinal and hamstring stretch.
- If the knees feel bothered, tighten the quadriceps to close the knee joint or bring legs closer together.
- If hamstrings feel too tight, bend the knee(s) and place a bolster under the thigh(s).
- Use a bolster under the chest, if you are close to the floor.
- If head is too heavy for the neck, support the head in hands.
- If you are stiff, bend the knees a lot! It is also okay to place the feet flat on the floor. When the knees are bent, and while sitting on a cushion, you can bend forward more easily and allow gravity to do the work.

- Can come into a twist by folding over one leg and rotating chest skyward (if advanced, hold the foot with both hands)
- Can also do a sitting up twist (which helps to stimulate the upper body meridians under the scapula).

Coming Out of the Pose:

- Use your hands to push the floor away and slowly roll up. Remember, slowly means "not fast." This is a test! If you pop right up quickly, you are a yangster. Be a yinster and slowly come up.
- Once you are up, lean back on your hands to release the hips, tighten the leg muscles, and drag or lift your legs to bring them together. Bounce or shake out the legs. Groaning is allowed. [1]

Counter poses:

- Windshield Wipers are nice, or do a cross-legged, seated backbend
- Tabletop

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- Urinary Bladder on back of legs and on the back, and the Liver and Kidney lines through the groin and the Spleen through the inner knees.
- The twisting version will stimulate the Gall Bladder along the side of the torso.

Joints Affected:

- Hips, lower back, and knees.

Recommended Hold Times:

- Three to ten minutes;

Other Notes:

- Very frustrating for beginners: the adductor muscles tug on the sitting bones, just like the hamstrings do, which causes the top of the hips to tilt backward. Persistence is required! Sitting on a bolster helps.
- Keep weight forward on the sitting bones; even tug the flesh away from the buttocks before folding forward.
- Often it is nice to spend half of the time in one variation and then add a twist for the last half of the pose

Square (Double Pigeon)



Benefits:

- Nice preparation for Lotus pose
- A deep opening of the hips through strong external rotation
- Decompresses the lower back when folding forward.

Contra-indications:

- Watch the pressure on the knees; if the hips are too tight, the pressure will go there.
- Can aggravate sciatica. If you have sciatica, elevate the hips by sitting on a cushion, until the knees are below the hips, or avoid this pose entirely. Beware of hips rotating backward while seated; we want them to rotate forward.
- If you have any lower back disorders which do not allow flexion of the spine, then do not allow the spine to round: keep the back as straight as you can

Getting Into the Pose:

- This can be a tricky one to get into. The key is to go where you feel some juiciness in the outer hips, never in the knees. Start by sitting with legs crossed. Move your feet forward until your shins are parallel to the front edge of your mat (your legs are "square" to it).
- Try to move your knees closer together without allowing your feet to come back closer to you

Alternatives & Options:

- Folding forward stretches the lower back and can intensify the stress in the hips. If you can't come forward, sit on a cushion.
- A deeper option is to place one ankle over the opposite knee and the other ankle under its opposite knee. If the first knee is very high in the air, you are not ready for this variation! Bring that foot to the floor in front of its opposite knee.
- If you're more flexible, try to slide the knees closer together, allowing the feet go further apart.

- If you're tight or experience discomfort in the knees, or if the knees are high off the floor, you can place blankets or some form of support under the knees.
- Other alternatives include Reclined Hip Opener, Shoelace, or Swan.

Coming Out of the Pose:

- Lean back and slowly straighten the legs out in front of you.

Counter poses:

- Bounce out the legs and tighten/release the knees a few times.
- This was a fairly deep external rotation of the hips, so we want to move the hips in the opposite direction. Some nice internal rotations of the hips are Deer or Windshield Wipers.
- If you're craving a backbend, perform Tabletop or lie down and do some Spinal Lifts.

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- Liver and Kidneys, because these lines come through the inner groin; Gall Bladder line on outer leg; Urinary Bladder line if folding forward.

Joints Affected:

- Hips and spine.

Recommended Hold Time

- Three to five minutes per side

Other Notes:

- If you're a beginner, you may tend to bring your feet close to the groin. Make sure this isn't simply a cross-legged sitting posture; we want to feel this in the hips.
- However, if you already feel this is stressing the hips a lot, simply by sitting cross-legged, then that is your version of Square pose! Be there and enjoy

Caterpillar (Seated Forward Fold – Paschimottanasana)



Benefits:

- Stresses the ligaments along the back of the spine
- Compresses the stomach organs, which helps strengthen the organs of digestion
- Stimulates the kidneys
- Since the heart is below the spine, the heart is massaged
- Helps to cure impotency and leads to sex control

Contra-indications:

- Can aggravate sciatica. If you have sciatica, elevate the hips by sitting on a cushion, until the knees are below the hips, or avoid this pose entirely. Beware of hips rotating backward while seated; we want them to rotate forward.
- If you have any lower back disorders which do not allow flexion of the spine, then do not allow the spine to round: keep the back as straight as you can
- If the hamstrings are very tight, the knees should be bent and supported by a bolster, allowing the spine to round.

Getting Into the Pose:

- Sit on a cushion with both legs straight out in front of you. Fold forward over the legs, allowing your back to round.

Alternatives & Options:

- If your hamstrings are really tight, you won't be able to fold forward enough to allow gravity to draw you down. Bend your knees and place a bolster underneath; allow the back to round fully. If that doesn't work, sit up on more cushions.
- If neck feels strained by the weight of the head, support your head in your hands, resting your elbows on the legs or a bolster.
- You can rest your chest on a bolster to help relax into the pose.
- You can do this pose with the legs up a wall (very nice for people who stand all day).
- If knees feel strained, activate the quadriceps (but not all the time!) or keep a small bend in the knees, perhaps with a blanket underneath.

- Experiment with hand positions. Rest your elbows on your thighs or the floor, or loosely hold the toes with your hands. No need to pull: gravity will do the work.
- If you're very flexible, it might be more challenging if you part your legs just enough that your chest fits between the legs.

Coming Out of the Pose:

- Use your hands to push the floor away and slowly roll up. Remember, slowly means "not fast." This is a test! If you pop right up quickly, you are a yangster. Be a yinster and slowly come up
- Once you are up, lean back on your hands to release the hips and then shake out the legs.

Counter poses:

- Sitting up or a gentle sitting back bend
- Lying on the stomach is a gentle back bend, as is doing a spinal lift flow on the back, or flow into Tabletop (aka Hammock)
- A seated twist

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- The Urinary Bladder.

Joints Affected:

- The spine.

Recommended Hold Times:

- Three to five minutes or more.

Similar Yang Asanas:

- Paschimottanasana, but here we are not trying to lengthen the spine or stretch the back muscles. Don't try to bring the head to the feet but, rather, allow the spine to round, while still tilting the pelvic bowl forward, so the head comes to the knees.

Other Notes:

- Paul Grilley claims this pose is excellent for balancing Chi flow, and preparing the body for meditation;
- Keep muscles relaxed especially in the legs;
- Make sure the tops of the hips are tilted forward. If the hips are rotating backward, sit on higher cushions and bend the knees more. Fold forward enough that gravity is doing the work, not your muscles. If you are not folding forward, you won't be able to relax completely. Let gravity have you! Surrendering is yin

Sleeping Butterfly (Cobbler's Pose)



Benefits:

- A nice way to stretch the lower back without requiring loose hamstrings
- If the legs are straighter and the feet are farther away from the groin, the hamstrings will get more of a stretch. If the feet are in closer to the groin, the adductor muscles get stretched more
- Good for the kidneys and prostate gland; highly recommended for people suffering from urinary problems
- Removes heaviness in the testicles and regulates periods, helps ovaries function properly, and makes childbirth easier

Contra-indications:

- Can aggravate sciatica. If you have sciatica, elevate the hips by sitting on a cushion, until the knees are below the hips, or avoid this pose entirely. Beware of hips rotating backward while seated; we want them to rotate forward
- If you have any lower back disorders which do not allow flexion of the spine, then do not allow the spine to round: keep the back as straight as you can or do the reclining version
- Avoid dropping the head down if the neck has suffered whiplash or has reverse curvature

Getting Into the Pose:

- From a seated position, bring the soles of your feet together and then slide them away from you. Allowing your back to round, fold forward, lightly resting your hands on your feet or on the floor in front of you. Your head should hang down toward your heels

Alternatives & Options:

- Elevate the hips with a bolster or cushion
- If the neck is too stressed, support the head in the hands, resting elbows on thighs or a block
- You could rest your chest on a bolster positioned across the thighs
- Various hand/arm positions are possible: hold feet, hands on floor in front of student, or arms relaxed behind the body

- If the back doesn't like this pose, you can do the reclining variation; lie down, keeping legs in butterfly

Coming Out of the Pose:

- Use your hands to push the floor away and slowly roll up. In Yin yoga, it is important to move slowly. Before straightening your legs, lean back on your hands to release the hips. Then slowly straighten each leg.

Counter poses:

- Gentle seated back bend
- Lying on stomach, which is also a gentle back bend
- Could do a spinal lift flow on the back or flow into Tabletop (aka Hammock)
- A seated twist.

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- The Gall Bladder lines on the outside of the legs as well as the Urinary Bladder lines running along the spine in the lower back
- If the feet are in close to the groin and a stretch is felt in the inner thighs, the Kidney and Liver lines are being stimulated.

Joints Affected:

- Hips and lower spine

Recommended Hold Times:

- Three to five minutes
- Can hold much longer, if desired ... or you may do this while reading, or talking on phone

Similar Yang Asanas:

- Baddha Konasana, but without the emphasis on a straight spine or the feet in tight to groin. In the Butterfly we want the back to round, allowing the head to drop to the heels.

Other Notes:

- Can be done after meals, as long as head does not touch the floor (which would place too much pressure in the abdomen)
- If the feet are closer in, tight adductors or lower back tightness may prevent student from folding forward. Move the feet farther away
- Many students will automatically go into a tight butterfly, because of their yang training ... they should be encouraged to move the feet away, forming a diamond shape with the legs
- This pose is nice for pregnant women because the legs are abducted, providing space for the belly

Half Butterfly (One Leg Seated Forward Fold - Janusirsasana)



Benefits

- Stretches the lower back without requiring loose hamstrings
- Targets the ligaments along the back of the spine
- Stimulates the liver and kidneys and aids digestion (when folding over the straight leg)

Contra-indications:

- Can aggravate sciatica. If you have sciatica, elevate the hips by sitting on a cushion, until the knees are below the hips, or avoid this pose entirely. Beware of hips rotating backward while seated; we want them to rotate forward
- If you have any lower back disorders which do not allow flexion of the spine, then do not allow the spine to round: keep the back as straight as you can or do the reclining version
- Avoid dropping the head down if the neck has suffered whiplash or has reverse curvature
- Beware of any sharp pain in the knees. If you have issues in this area, tighten the top of the thigh (engage the quadriceps), which will close the joint, or bring the legs closer together
- If the bent knee complains, place support under that thigh or move that foot away from the groin
- If the hamstrings protest, bend the straight knee and support the thigh with a blanket or block

Getting Into the Pose:

- From a seated position, draw one foot in toward you and stretch the other leg straight out to the side. Allowing your back to round, fold forward, down the middle between both legs

Alternatives & Options:

- Folding over the straight leg may stretch the hamstrings more
- Reach the opposite hand to the extended foot and/or lower that shoulder to emphasize the side of the spine
- Add a twist to the spine by resting the elbow on the thigh and the head in that hand (or for more flexible students, placing the arm alongside the straight leg) and the other arm behind the back or over the head. Rotate the

chest toward the sky. This deepens the emphasis along the side of the ribs and spine

- Place the foot of the bent knee in Virasana (folded backward behind the buttock), but only if knee doesn't complain

Coming Out of the Pose:

- Slowly roll up, pushing the floor away with your hands. Before straightening the opposite leg, lean back on your hands to release the hips. Then slowly straighten the leg

Counter poses:

- Sitting up or a gentle sitting back bend
- Flow into Tabletop (aka Hammock)
- Windshield Wipers

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- Urinary Bladder;
- If there is a lot of sensation in the groin and inner legs, the Liver and Kidneys are stimulated

Joints Affected:

- Spine, especially the back and side
- Knees, knees, although this is not as deep of a stretch for the inner knees as the Dragonfly

Recommended Hold Times:

- This can be held a long time about five minutes, with the variations added after about three minutes

Similar Yang Asanas:

- Janusirsasana, but here we aren't trying to bring the head to the foot; rather, we are bringing the head towards the knee, while still folding forward from the hips. Allow the back to round

Deer



Benefits:

- A nice counter pose to hip openers or any external rotation of the hips
- Balanced way to rotate hips both externally (front) and internally (back leg)
- Improves digestion and relieves gas
- Helps to relieve the symptoms of menopause
- Reduces swelling of the legs during pregnancy (until the end of the second trimester)
- Therapeutic for high blood pressure and asthma

Contra-indications:

- If any knee issues exist, be careful of externally rotating the hip (front knee); keep that foot in closer to the groin. You could support the front knee with a bolster or folded blanket.

Getting Into the Pose:

- Start by sitting in Butterfly on the floor, then swing your right leg back behind you, bringing the foot behind your hip. Position the front leg by moving the foot away from you. Try to make a right angle with the front knee. Move the back foot away from your hip until you start to feel like you are tipping away from that foot. Keep both sitting bones firmly rooted to the ground

Alternatives and Options

- The tendency here is to tilt away from the internally rotating hip of the back leg; make sure both sitting bones are firmly on the floor; you may need to move the feet more inwards, toward the core of the body.
- If you're very flexible, you can begin to move your feet away from the hips.
- To get a nice stretch to the side body and the back thigh, twist around toward the back foot by rotating to the opposite side. You may rest on your elbow here and try to bring your head to the floor.

Coming Out of the Pose:

- Lean away from the back foot and bring that leg forward, coming back to Butterfly and ready to do the second side.

Counter poses:

- Since this pose is both an external and internal hip rotation, the best counter pose is to do the other side.
- Windshield Wipers are nice: they can be done lying down, sitting up, or reclining on elbows.

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- If the front leg is firmly on the floor or if you are twisting, the Gall Bladder line is activated. Any inner groin sensations indicate that the Liver and Kidneys are benefiting. If the thigh is stretched, the Stomach and Spleen are activated.

Joints Affected:

- Hips mostly, but if you include the twisting version the spine will also benefit.

Recommended Hold Times:

- Most can't do this pose well enough to get a lot of benefit from it, so it is useful mainly as a counterpose (in which case, hold for up to one minute).

Similar Yang Asanas:

- This is a combination of Virasana (Hero Pose) for the back leg and Padmasana (Lotus Pose) or Baddha Konasana (Butterfly) for the front leg.

Other Notes:

- Useful after long-held, external hip rotations such as Shoelace, Swan, or Dragonfly, where both legs were wide apart;
- Most students won't easily understand what the pose is about. They may not move their feet far enough away from the groin or hips, or they will tilt too much, allowing the internally rotated hip to rise off the floor. Teachers will have to inspect the efforts of their students and offer guidance

Snail (Plow – Halasana)



Benefits:

- One of the deepest releases of the whole spine
- Relaxes the heart, brings more blood flow to the head, drains the lungs, and compresses the internal organs, giving them a great massage

Contra-indications:

- This pose puts a lot of pressure on the neck; be cautious! Avoid if you have any neck problems.
- Not recommended for anyone with high blood pressure, upper body infection, vertigo, glaucoma, or a cold; also women during their menstrual cycle may find it better not to do this pose.
- If you have any lower back disorders which do not allow flexion of the spine, then do not attempt this posture.
- Do not do this posture if you have recently eaten or are pregnant

Getting Into the Pose:

- Start in a lying down position. Lift your hips and support them with your hands. Allow your back to round (unlike the Plough pose (Halasana) in which we strive to keep the spine and legs straight) and your feet to fall over your head toward the floor. Position the weight of your body onto your shoulders; note how much weight is on your neck-some is okay, but not too much.

Alternatives & Options:

- There are many intermediate stages to this pose. For beginners, or those not wishing to invert, replace this pose with a seated, straight leg, forward fold (such as Caterpillar)
- Bend the knees toward the floor for the deepest rounding for the spine.
- Very challenging option: with the knees bent toward the floor, twist until both knees are on one side of the head. Remember to do both sides.
- If legs are straight and feet are touching the floor, the hands can come to the floor behind the back. Hands can be apart (easier) or together (if there are no shoulder problems), but be careful; bringing the hands together could aggravate rotator cuff problems.



Knees Bent Option

Coming Out of the Pose:

- The simplest way to come out is to keep the knees bent and hold your hips. Allow yourself to slowly roll down. Your head will likely lift up as you come down. Don't strain to keep your head on the floor.
- More challenging is to come out with the legs straight and holding the feet. Slowly roll down, holding the feet as a way to slow your descent.

Counter poses:

- After coming out, lie down for a few breaths with the knees bent and feet flat on the floor.
- Do Windshield Wipers then a gentle back bend, such as lying on the stomach, or a mild spinal lift. Come up only halfway.
- Gentle Fish (Matsyasana) helps to release the neck and move the spine into extension.
- If Fish pose is too much, if the neck feels weak or tweaked, do an Upward Facing Cat instead.
- Child's Pose

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- All internal organs are massaged and compressed, and each breath adds to the massage.
- Urinary Bladder lines are deeply stretched.

Joints Affected:

- The full spine

Recommended Hold Times:

- Three to five minutes.

Other Notes:

- Prepare the neck first by doing gentle forward neck bends.
- A nice alternative is Happy Baby, which allows the sacrum to lift off the floor.
- Allow the spine to fully round. Do not try to keep the spine straight and the hips high

Cat Pulling Its Tail



Benefits:

- A nice counterpose to strong forward bends (such as the Snail or Caterpillar)
- Mildly compresses the lower back
- Opens the quadriceps and upper thighs.

Contra-indications:

- If you have lower back issues, go gently. You may not be able to pull the foot away at all.

Getting Into the Pose:

- Start by sitting with both legs out in front of you. Twist to the right and recline onto your right elbow. Keeping your bottom (right) leg straight, bring your top (left) leg forward and to the side. Bend the bottom leg, bringing that heel toward your buttock. Reach back with your top (left) hand and grab the bottom foot. Pull the foot away from you.
- You may begin lying down. From here, roll onto your right side. Keeping your bottom (right) leg straight, bring your top (left) leg to the side. Bend the bottom leg, bringing that heel toward your buttock. Reach back with your top (left) hand and grab the bottom foot. Pull the foot away from you

Alternatives & Options:

- Easiest version is to be propped up on one arm, as shown in the first picture.
- The more challenging version is to recline, and look over shoulder to the bottom foot. This version becomes a reclining twist with a back bend.



Coming Out of the Pose:

- Release the bottom foot and roll onto your stomach. Straighten the bottom leg and roll onto your back.

Counter poses:

- Hug the knees to the chest to release the lower back in a gentle forward fold. Do this either while lying on your back or in Child's Pose.

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- Stimulates the Stomach and Spleen meridians (if the top of the thigh is activated) and the Urinary Bladder and Kidney lines (when the back is arched and twisted).
- If you feel a twist through the side of the rib cage, the Gall Bladder meridian is being stimulated.

Joints Affected:

- Mostly opens the lumbar/sacrum.
- The feeling of a twist may indicate that the rib cage is getting some juice, too.

Recommended Hold Times:

- One minute if done as a counterpose to a forward bend
- Can hold for three to five minutes as a reclining twist

Other Notes:

- If you are actively pulling the foot away, the pose becomes yang-like in nature. Allow the arms and legs to relax in this posture.

Happy Baby



Benefits:

- A deep hip opener and one that can use arm strength, rather than letting gravity do the work.
- If you do pull with the arms, the arm flexion strengthens the biceps
- Releases and decompresses the sacroiliac (SI) joints
- Can be a compression of stomach organs

Contra-indications:

- This can become a mild inversion: a student may want to avoid this posture if she is in her moon cycle, or if she has very high blood pressure.

Getting Into the Pose:

- Lying on your back, hug the knees to your chest. Grab the soles of the feet, the ankles, or the back of the legs. Open the feet apart so that they are above your knees, and pull the knees towards the floor alongside your chest. Relax your head and shoulders down to the floor

Alternatives & Options:

- Half Happy Baby (like an upside down Baby Dragon), holding one foot at a time
- If you're very tight, you may use a belt to hold your feet, or you may do this against a wall. It is like a lying down Squat, but with the feet pushing into the wall.
- Can hold the back of the thighs;
- Can keep your toes together for a first stage, leaving them near the groin; for a later stage, bring the toes to your nose.
- Eventually, feet go behind the head! [1]
- After a few minutes of active pulling with the arms, relax and just let the weight of the legs draw the knees down to the floor
- There are two options you can try here:
 1. Allow the tailbone to curve up in the air (releases the SI joints)
 2. Keep the tailbone low to the ground. Notice the differences!

- A deeper option that can work the hamstrings as well as the hips is to gradually straighten the legs while still pulling the feet down and wider apart, but in this option do not allow your hips to lift off the floor

Coming Out of the Pose:

- Release the feet, placing them on the floor, with the knees bent. Pause for a moment.

Counter poses:

- Gentle backbends (lying on stomach) or, while on the back, a mild spinal lift, coming up only halfway
- Windshield Wipers while lying down moves the hips from the external rotation of Happy Baby into an internal rotation. Lying down with your knees bent and your feet on the floor as wide apart as the mat, drop the knees from side to side.

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- Stimulates the spine and thus the Urinary Bladder, and Kidney meridians while stimulation through the inner groins also works the Liver meridians.

Joints Affected:

- Hips and SI/lumbar spine

Recommended Hold Times:

- Two minutes if you are actively pulling with the arms but if you relax the arms, you can linger up to five minutes

Twisted Roots (Reclined Twist)



Benefits:

- Twisting at the end of the practice helps to restore equilibrium in the nervous system and release tension in the spine.
- Sarah Powers notes that bringing the bent knee more to the chest can relieve sciatica.
- Massages the stomach and cures gastritis.

Contra-indications:

- If you have shoulder issues (such as rotator cuff injuries) or are prone to tingling in the hands when you extend your arms overhead, you may not want to raise your arm to rest beside the ear or to let it float. Instead, bend the raised arm or support it with a bolster. If tingling persists, draw the hand lower or rest it on the ribs.

Getting Into the Pose:

- Lying on your back, draw both knees into your chest. Open your arms to the side like wings and drop the knees to one side.

Alternatives & Options:

- Directing the knees lower, or higher, will affect where in the spine the stretch is felt. If the knees are higher, this moves the twist to the upper back; lowering the knees moves the twist more to the lumbar/sacrum.
- For a deeper twist, draw one knee into the chest and, holding that knee with the opposite hand, draw it across the body. Rock back and forth a few times, but try to keep the shoulder blades flat on the floor. If the shoulder is off the floor, place a bolster under the bent knee(s).
- If the shoulder is still floating, place a blanket under the shoulder or a bolster along the spine.
- Experiment with the head turning your head to either side and notice how the sensations change.
- The hand alongside the ear can be resting on the floor or on a bolster.
- Try the Twisted Roots pose with knees crossed as in eagle pose (Garudasana).

- Placing the top leg straight out to the side applies the most leverage, which helps to keep the hips fully turned. For some, it's less of a twist and more of a stretch to the outside of the leg and hip: great for the IT band. The deepest version of this option is to hold the foot with the opposite hand.

Coming Out of the Pose:

- Slowly roll onto your back and hug the knees into the chest to release the sacrum and lumbar.

Counter poses:

- Hug the knees and rock on your back from side to side
- Windshield Wipers while lying back can be a nice release. Lying down with your knees bent and your feet on the floor as wide apart as the mat, drop the knees from side to side.

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- Twisting the spine stimulates the Urinary Bladder lines along the spine (the ida and pingala nadis)
- If one arm is overhead, several meridians in the arms are stimulated - the Heart, Lung, and Small Intestines.
- Twists compress the stomach and massage the internal organs. Twisting through the rib cage stimulates the Gall Bladder meridians.
- Helps the liver, spleen, and pancreas

Joints Affected:

- Nurtures the shoulder joint and upper spine, as well as all the tissues in the upper chest, breast, and shoulder.
- When the knee is at 90 degrees or less, the lower spine, especially the lumbar and sacroiliac joints are stressed.

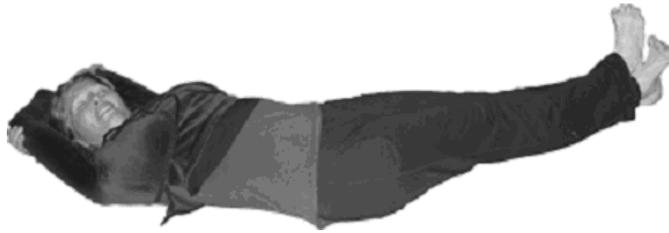
Recommended Hold Time:

- Three to five minutes.

Other Notes:

- An excellent final pose of the practice, because it removes any kinks and knots
- You can slide right from this pose into Shavasana.
- If tingling occurs in the arms or hands, move them lower until the blood flows again.
- Twisted Roots is a great way to internally rotate the hips after a lot of external hip rotation work, such as Shoelace, Swan, Square or Winged Dragon poses.
- Don't push into the twist, relax. Let gravity do the work.

Bananasana (C-Shape Stretch)



Benefits:

- A delicious way to stretch the whole side of the body
- Works the spine in a lateral flexion (side bend) from the iliotibial (IT) band to the tops of the side rib cage
- Stretches the oblique stomach muscles and the side intercostal muscles between the ribs
- We can even get into the arm pit and get a nice stretch there

Contra-indications:

- If prone to tingling in the hands when extending your arms overhead, you may need to place a bolster under the arm or simply bring the hands down.
- If you have lower back issues, you may wish to not go too deep in this pose.

Getting Into the Pose

- Lying on your back with your legs together and straight on the floor, reach the arms overhead and clasp your hands or elbows. With your buttocks firmly glued to the earth, move your feet and upper body to the right. Arch like a nice, ripe banana. Be careful not to twist or roll your hips off the floor. Find your first edge. When your body opens more, move both feet further to the right and pull your upper body further to the right, as well. Keep playing this edge. Don't forget to do both sides!

Alternatives & Options:

- When your feet are as far to the side as you can get them, try crossing the ankles. Most students feel the greatest stretch by crossing the outside ankle over the inner ankle, but some feel more benefit crossing the other way.
- If you feel any tingling in the hands, try supporting the arms with a bolster, or rest the arms across the chest.

Coming Out of the Pose

- Simply move your legs back to straight and bring your arms down

Counter poses:

- Hug the knees to the chest to release the back in a gentle forward fold.
- Circle the knees to massage the sacrum and lumbar.

- Or, spontaneously erupt into any pose that feels organic.

Meridians & Organs Affected:

- This is a great opening and stretching of the Gall Bladder meridian, which runs all along the side of the body.
- If the student raises arms overhead, she may also be stimulating the Heart and Lung meridians.

Joints Affected:

- This moves the spine and the rib cage in a lateral flexion.

Recommended Hold Times:

- This can be held for 3~ 5 minutes to allow your banana to become really ripe.

Similar Yang Asanas:

- A lying down version of Crescent Stretch.

Other Notes:

- Occasionally a student will ask for a pose that can work the iliotibial band (the IT band). This is it! If you feel tugging at the outside of the hip (the greater trochanter), then you may be working your tensor fascia latae or the gluteus maximus, both of which attach to the IT band

Savasana

For an active yang practice, a good rule of thumb is to allow yourself 10% to 15% of your practice time for savasana. This means that for a 90 minute class, you will allow at least 9 minutes for savasana. For the yin style, since the muscles were not used as much, a shorter period is okay - maybe 5% or 8% of practice time, or 5-7 minutes for a 90-minute class. However, check in with your students and see how much time would be right on that particular day.

Savasana is not just a time to relax the body; in this quiet time the mind should remain alert, yet relaxed and aware of the body relaxing. In Yin yoga, students are encouraged to pay attention to the energies flowing. This is an ideal time to develop your ability to feel your energies. Practicing watching the energies during your Savasana will assist you to feel energy flowing at other times. As you actively relax, watch the flow of Chi or prana into and out of the areas you worked in the asana practice. At first you may have to pretend, or imagine, you can feel these energies. Pretending will help you look closely at these areas. In time, you will notice the energy flow more easily.

Savasana Sample Script

Scan your body slowly. Start with your toes and feet - allow your feet to relax. Feel them becoming heavy on the floor. Allow your awareness to rise up to the ankles, calves, and shins. Feel them melting into the earth; no effort is needed. Feel the space in the knee joints. Move slowly higher. Relax the thighs. Feel them become heavy, warm, soft. Notice your buttocks, hips, and groin relaxing; they too become soft and warm. If you have done a lot of hip work in your practice, linger here for a while feeling the openness, the flow of energy through the hips.

Now allow your awareness to come to the tailbone, Feel your sacrum and lower back release into the floor. Feel your lower back and stomach muscles relax. Allow this sensation to rise up the spine. Feel each vertebra - the space between them and their alignment. Allow the upper back muscles and the shoulder blades to sink into the floor. Relax your chest and all the muscles between the ribs. Come now to the shoulders, where we carry so much tension in our bodies. Let the shoulders release completely. Spend an extra moment here, and really soften. Feel the weight of the shoulders sink into the earth. Allow this sensation of softness to flow down the arms. Relax the upper arms, the elbow, and the forearms. Feel the space in the wrist joints. Feel the space around each finger and the energy in the palm of each hand

Bring your awareness to your neck and throat, and release all tension there. Relax your jaw, lips, and tongue; relax your cheeks and eyes and all the muscles around the eyes and deep in the eye sockets; relax your forehead and your scalp. Allow your head to rest heavily on the floor.

Now relax your inner organs. Bring your awareness to the reproductive organs, and

either feel or imagine them relaxing. Relax your intestines, and kidneys. Imagine your liver, stomach, and spleen being filled with healing energies. Soften your diaphragm and lungs. Relax your heart. Let your heart become open ... vast ... undefended, and ... smiling.

Release the breath totally: let it be whatever it wants to be. Notice the breath - become aware of the short pauses between each breath. Relax your mind ... notice that the moment between each breath is the moment between thoughts. Enjoy those moments of complete silence and peace; feel this sense of peace growing deeper. Let this feeling of peace fill you; let it fill the space around you; let peace fill the room and beyond, touching everyone and everything

Sequencing

Teachers of Yin yoga often focus on a specific area of interest in any particular class. Whether it's the spine, hips, or better digestion, knowing what you want to do makes it a lot easier to decide which postures to choose to use. In the section on Asanas you reviewed the benefits of the poses most commonly practiced in Yin Yoga. Pick out a few key poses that will help the areas you want to focus on and then you will be ready to link them together.

In Yin Yoga we are not actually trying to warm up; we want the muscles to remain cool, so that they are not taking up all the stress of the postures. When the muscles are cool, the stretch can go deeper into the connective tissues. But we still want to have a period at the beginning of the practice when we ease into the body. There are a few asanas that work well at the beginning of a practice to get us started. These are:

- Butterfly - loosens up the spine for deeper forward bends
- Caterpillar - loosens up the spine for deeper forward bends
- Child Pose - grounding and soothing
- Dangling - loosens up the spine for deeper forward bends
- Frog (aka Tadpole) - loosens up the hips and upper back
- Sphinx - loosens up the spine for deeper back bends

Each of these postures begins to work a specific area of the body and prepares it for the deeper postures to come. Not all asanas are equal. Before going deep into a back bend you will want to do a gentler back bend to prepare the body. The same advice applies to forward bends or twists. It is important to open the body with easier postures before going to the deeper openings. This is especially true for Yin yoga since we don't usually include a comprehensive warm up before practice. A very flexible student could start her practice with almost any postures if she remembers the first tattva of Yin Yoga: play your edges appropriately. However, there are a few asanas that definitely need preparation before attempting. Even the most flexible students will want to work up to asanas like Snail, the full Seal or the winged Dragon. Before the Snail, loosen up the neck. Before the deepest back bend like the Seal, do a gentler back bend. Before the deepest hip openers, start with milder versions.

Many asanas seem to beg to be paired with other asanas; Shoelace seems to flow naturally, organically into a seated twist. Twists easily flow from one side to the other, and back bends like camel, move easily into child's pose. Some yang poses seem to be made for when we come out of yin poses: Down Dog feels so good after the Swan. And if you never really cared for Down Dog before, after five minutes of Dragon, you will quickly learn why the Dog is a yogi's best friend.

Counter Poses

In the yang styles of yoga, some sort of counterpose to release the tissues follows every deeply held posture. Counterposes move the body in the opposite direction of the previous pose. This may be as simple as doing the left side after doing the right side of a pose or doing a back bend after a long, deep forward bend. However, the counterpose should never be as deep as the original pose. This is good advice for a yang practice. In the yin style, counterposes are also recommended; however, they do not need to occur right away. It is nice to do some gentle yang movements between postures to relieve any incipient stagnation and to get the energy flowing again. However, it is not necessary to do a counterpose immediately after any particular asana. Feel free to do all your forward bends before moving into back bends. Do all your hip work before moving on to the counterposes. Most counterposes are very logical. Back bends balance forward bends and vice versa. Right balances left. Internal rotation of the hips balances external rotations. Twists can be used to balance almost any pose involving the spine. By the time you have finished your practice, make sure you have done counterposes for all the deep postures you've held.

Let the body just rest between poses, especially if the pose was a very deep one. Your body will probably overrule any ego-driven urge to quickly move into another, more challenging pose. Respect the body's wishes and take your time between the postures

For some students, one side of the body is definitely more open than the other side. Yin yoga teachers suggest that students start the asana on their more open side first. They say that your closed side will watch with amazement at what is happening and will be inspired to open that much as well. Of course, if you don't know which side is more open, it really doesn't matter.

In Yin yoga, if you are short of time, it is recommended to do fewer postures instead of holding many poses for less time. It is those last few breaths that give you the most benefit in a pose. In Yin yoga, if you have time for only one posture, do the Butterfly (cobbler's pose).

Finally, be aware of how much time you have allowed for your practice. The opening meditation and poses can take up to fifteen percent of this time, and finishing postures, including Savasana, may be another fifteen percent or so. That leaves you seventy percent of the time for the key poses you really wanted to get into. Be aware of the time as you flow. Don't shortchange the ending because you got carried away with the fun postures in the middle of the practice. Like many forms of yoga, savasana is the most important part of a yin practice.

Finishing a Yin Practice

In the yang styles of yoga, the teacher will allow a significant amount of time at the end of the class to cool the body down. Again, in the yin practice this is not necessary. We never warmed the body up, but we still want to find a way back to neutrality, to balance. Any of the beginning asanas could work well at the end of a class, but the pose most often done is the reclining twist. This asana allows the body to fully relax and release. It is one of the most yin-like asanas of all.

The twist in the spine can be directly higher or lower to relieve whatever area was most worked in the practice. Moving the knees higher toward the armpit brings the twist more up the spine by curving the spine forward. Pointing the knees straight away straightens the spine, allowing the twist to be even along its length. Moving the knees downward arches the spine slightly, bringing the emphasis in the twist to the lumbar/sacrum.

Of course, twisting the spine can be done in many orientations. You can do it sitting up as well as lying down. And twisting the spine is not the only way to end your practice; but twisting does restore equilibrium to the nervous system and gets a lot of the residual kinks out of the system. Once the kinks are out, we are ready for savasana.

Sample Lesson Plans

Sequence Focus

The following sequence balances what traditional Chinese medicine calls the kidney meridian—essential for mind-body health. It is thought that when kidney chi is revitalized, a person will feel more vibrant. The following sequence includes passive backbends, because the kidney channel flows through the lower back. Seated forward bends act as counterposes and stimulate the urinary bladder meridian, which intersects all of the other meridians in the body.

1. Butterfly Pose

Sit on a blanket or cushion. With your weight on the front edge of your sitting bones, bend your knees, press the soles of your feet together, and let your legs drop out like butterfly wings. Take your heels at least a foot away from your hips. With your hands on your ankles, bend forward from the hips to your appropriate edge, then relax your upper spine and let it round. Rest your head in the arches of the feet, on top of the stacked fists, or cupped in the hands while the elbows rest on the feet. If you can, stay for 3 to 5 minutes in all of the poses in this sequence. Inhale as you come up, then stretch your legs forward and lean back on your hands. Pause for a few moments in a neutral position after each pose.

2. Saddle Pose

Sit on your shins and lean back on your hands. (If this is already too much for your knees, skip this pose.) Lower yourself slowly onto your back, keeping your lower back in an exaggerated arch. If your quadriceps feel strained, rest your shoulders and head on top of a bolster or a folded blanket. Otherwise, come down onto your elbows or upper back, allowing your knees to spread apart if you need to. If there is too much pressure on your ankles, place a folded towel or blanket underneath them. To come up, place your hands where your elbows were. Engage your abdominal muscles and inhale as you lift yourself up.

3. Sphinx Pose

Lie on your belly with your legs outstretched. Place your elbows on the floor shoulder distance apart and about an inch or so ahead of the shoulder line. Place your hands straight forward or hold on to your elbows. Rest here without slumping into your shoulders or lifting them up. Let your belly and organs drape toward the floor as you relax your buttocks and legs. If your back feels sensitive, engage your outer buttocks and inner legs all or part of the time to lessen the strong sensations.

4. Seal Pose

This pose is similar to Sphinx but creates more of an arch in the lower back. Begin on your belly, propped up on your hands with your arms straight. Place your hands about 4 inches in front of the shoulders. Turn the hands out slightly, like seal flippers. Distribute your weight evenly across your hands to avoid stressing your wrists. If it's tolerable, relax the muscles in the buttocks and legs. If not,

contract them from time to time to relieve the intense sensations. Your ability to remain muscularly soft may take a few months of practice. Be patient, but do not endure sharp or electrical sensations. Stay for 3 to 5 minutes. On an exhalation, lower yourself down slowly. Remain still and breathe into the whole spine as you rest.

5. Child's Pose

When it feels appropriate to move again, place your hands under your chest, and on an inhalation, lift your upper body away from the floor. As you exhale, bend your knees and draw your hips back toward your feet in Child's Pose.

6. Half Dragonfly Pose

Sit on a blanket or cushion with your right leg outstretched and the sole of your left foot pressing into your inner right thigh. Move your left knee back a few inches. If the knee does not rest on the floor, place a cushion under it. As you exhale, bend your spine over your right leg, placing your hands on either side of it. Do both sides before moving on.

7. Dragonfly Pose

Bring your legs into a straddle, exhale, and bend forward from the hips. Place your hands on the floor in front of you, or rest on your elbows or on a support like a bolster or folded blanket. If it feels natural, come all the way down onto your belly. If your knees are unstable, back off the pose and engage the quadriceps from time to time. Attempt to hold this pose for 5 minutes or more.

8. Full Forward Bend

Gently bring your legs back together. Bend forward at the hips, curving your spine into a forward bend. If you have sciatica or if your hips tilt backward, eliminate this pose and lie on the floor with your legs up the wall.

9. Savasana (Corpse Pose)

Come into Corpse Pose with your palms facing up or with your hands resting on your abdomen. Place the legs wider than the hips and relax your buttocks, legs, and feet. Invite ease in your mind and body, making this the most nourishing posture of all

Sample Sequences – Beginner’s Sequences

Sample Lesson 1

Time: Sixty minutes

This flow is a gentle one. Hold each posture for three minutes. Relax the body in any way that feels comfortable for thirty to sixty seconds between the asanas.

Opening Meditation

Some breath with gentle movement

Butterfly

Dragonfly: fold over right leg

Dragonfly: fold over left leg

Dragonfly: fold down the middle

Sphinx

Child's Pose

Seal

Child's Pose

Half Shoelace with right leg forward

Half Shoelace with left leg forward

Happy Baby

Reclining Twist on right side

Reclining Twist on left side

Savasana

Finishing Meditation

The above flow can be extended to ninety minutes by increasing the holds to five minutes per posture.

Sample Lesson 2

Time: Ninety minutes

Hold these poses for four minutes. This will make this flow more challenging than the first flow. Again relax the body in any way that feels comfortable for thirty to sixty seconds between the asanas

Opening Meditation

Frog ... tadpole for first two minutes

... full frog for a second two minutes

Child's Pose for one minute

Sphinx

Child's Pose for one minute

Shoelace with right leg on top
Sleeping Swan with right leg back
Shoelace with left leg on top
Sleeping Swan with left leg back

Caterpillar

Dragon cycle with right leg forward
 Baby Dragon for first two minutes
 Overstepping Dragon for last two minutes
Down dog for up to one minute
Child's Pose for one minute
Dragon cycle with left leg forward
 Baby Dragon for first two minutes
 Overstepping Dragon for last two minutes
Down Dog for up to one minute
Child's Pose for one minute

Reclining Twist on right side
Reclining Twist on left side
Shavasana
Finishing Meditation

Sample Lesson Plan 3

Time: Ninety Minutes

Opening Meditation

Butterfly for one minute
Swan with right leg back for one minute
Sleeping Swan for two minutes
Butterfly for one minute
Swan with left leg back for one minute
Sleeping Swan for two minutes
Down Dog (yang posture to release muscles / counterpose)

Dragonfly for three minutes
Sphinx, or Seal, for three minutes
Child's Pose for one minute

Dragon Cycle: right foot forward - one minute in each position
 Baby Dragon
 Dragon Flying High
 Dragon Flying Low
Down Dog for one minute

Child's Pose for one minute
Dragon Cycle: left foot forward - one minute in each position
 Baby Dragon
 Dragon Flying High
 Dragon Flying Low
Down Dog for one minute

Child's Pose for one minute with knees apart
Frog ... tadpole for two minutes
Frog ... full frog for two minutes
Child's Pose with knees closer for one minute
Melting Heart for three minutes

Half Butterfly with right leg straight to the side for three minutes
Hug knees to chest, while sitting, for one minute
Half Butterfly with left leg straight to the side for three minutes
Lie on back and hug knees to chest for one minute
Twisted Roots on right side
Twisted Roots on left side
Savasana
Finishing Meditation

Sample Yin Yoga Transcript

Sample for Teaching Butterfly (Cobbler's Pose)

You may find you need some extra support. If you do, feel free to sit on your blanket or placing a bolster in front of you for support. Bring your feet out in front of you and bring the soles of your feet together. Push your feet away from your pelvic floor until your legs create a diamond shape. Inhale, lifting up through the crown of the head, and exhale, begin to fold forward, bringing your elbows in front of your shins, and dropping your forehead towards your feet.

Always take the first 30 seconds or so to tell if this is the way you can be in the pose for the next five minutes or so. Take a few moments to shift around, noticing each part of your body, and finding a comfortable position. You want to be as still as possible in this posture. However, if your neck becomes uncomfortable, move your neck into a comfortable position. During this practice, there will be long periods of silence. I encourage you to use this time for meditation and mindfulness. This can be very challenging so please always be gentle with yourself.

Yin was developed as a way to prepare the body and the mind for meditation. Therefore, we can use this time to practice our mindfulness. Staying present in our mind and with our breath as much as possible, allowing the thoughts to come and go. One method of creating mindfulness is to focus on the breath. At the beginning of postures, I encourage you to begin silently counting on your inhale and counting on your exhale. Early on in the practice you may have a lower lung capacity, so perhaps counting to 3 or 4 as you inhale, pausing at the top, and to 3 or 4 as you exhale. Over time for the posture, you may notice that sensation begins to occur in the body. We can use our breath not only to regulate our breathing and remain mindful, but to also soften the sensation in the body.

(Be silent for a minute)

Because we have been holding this posture for quite a while, it is important to come out of the posture both slowly and mindfully. As we come out, we continue to focus on the breath and the sensations in the body. In this posture, we inhale upright and find a gentle counter pose. I'll recommend a pose, but if this doesn't feel right for you, feel free to do something different. If it feels right to you, bring your hands behind you with your knees bent and together and feet still on the floor. Lean back slightly and begin rocking your knees from side to side.

Create Your Own Yin Yoga Sequence

Make a sample lesson plan for a yin yoga practice, including a list of asanas in the order you will practice them, and talking points to include while students are in each posture.

List of Postures for your sample practice:

In this next section, write down: quotes, verses from the Yoga Sutras, or talking points related to yoga and your experience of yoga to discuss while students are in each posture:

Once you've created your sample lesson plan, practice teaching a part of your plan